

Maidstone Joint Transportation Board



**October
2023**

Maidstone Integrated Transport Package (MITP)

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| Decision Making Authority | Kent County Council/Maidstone Borough Council |
| Lead Director | Haroona Chughtai |
| Lead Head of Service | Tim Read |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Barry Stiff/Lee Burchill |
| Wards and County Divisions affected | Maidstone Borough including Tonbridge & Malling |
| Which Member(s) requested this report? | Committee |

This report makes the following recommendations:

For Information. That this report be noted.

Timetable

| Meeting | Date |
|--|-----------------|
| Maidstone Joint Transportation Board – Update Report | 18 October 2023 |

Maidstone Integrated Transport Package (MITP)

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This report provides an update in respect of the major schemes currently in progress within Maidstone and the proposed junction improvements contained within the Maidstone Integrated Transport Package (MITP). A map showing the locations of these schemes is included as Appendix 1.

2. SCHEME UPDATES:

2.1 **A249 Bearsted Road Major Infrastructure Project (Funded through National Productivity Investment Fund):**

- 2.1.1 The site offices and compound are now in place and operational in the field to the northeast of New Cut Road roundabout.
- 2.1.2 Drainage works to establish the settlement lagoon and new drainage outfall within Maidstone Crematorium are continuing.
- 2.1.3 Drainage works to the south of the compound area are underway within the area of widening to the northeast of New Cut Road roundabout.
- 2.1.4 Further works will commence in October 2023 to form the new access onto Newnham Court Way and provide the new access road into Newnham Court Shopping Village.
- 2.1.5 The programme for these works is currently being finalised with the Contractor, landowner, utility companies and KCC's Streetworks team. The majority of works prior to January 2024 will be limited to offline works to form the new access roads into Newnham Court Shopping Village.
- 2.1.6 The scheme to improve M20 Junction 7 can now move forward, following the confirmation of CIL funding by Maidstone Borough Council.
- 2.1.7 KCC are finalising the appointment of a design consultant to complete the design and obtain the necessary technical approvals from National Highways. A programme for this project will be confirmed at a subsequent JTB meeting but it is currently anticipated that this project will commence after the completion of the Bearsted Road and M2 Junction 5 projects.

2.2 **A20 Coldharbour Roundabout/A20 London Road - Hall Road (LGF Scheme):**

- 2.2.1 Tenders for the Coldharbour junction improvement have been returned and assessed. Final negotiations with the tenderers are currently taking place and the appointment of a contractor is now expected in early November 2023.
- 2.2.2 The project is due to commence in January 2024 and take approximately 10 months to complete. A more detailed programme will be provided at a future JTB meeting following the appointment of a contractor.
- 2.2.3 Following stakeholder and community feedback the originally planned works to the A20 London Road/Hall Road junction in Aylesford, have been stopped.

- 2.2.4 Updated Traffic Data has been taken on board to inform the options available to improve the capacity and flood alleviation without the installation of a roundabout.
- 2.2.5 Our current focus of activity is working with the Crown Estate, who own the South Aylesford Retail Park, to see if a capacity improvement to the junction can also offer a practical solution to the recurring drainage problems at the A20/Hall Road/Mills Road junction.

2.3 **A229 Loose Road Corridor (LGF Scheme):**

2.3.1 The Loose Road corridor comprises of four separate junction improvement schemes:

- A229 Loose Road junction with the A274 Sutton Road (Wheatsheaf junction)
- A229 Loose Road junction with Armstrong Road/Park Way
- A229 Loose Road junction with Sheals Crescent
- A229 Loose Road junction with Cripple Street/Boughton Lane

2.3.2 **A229 Loose Road junction with the A274 Sutton Road (Wheatsheaf junction)**

2.3.3 As has been reported in previous JTB updates, due to delays to the project, notably through Covid Impacts, KCC decided to implement this scheme in two phases. This would allow any post Covid changes in traffic flows and travel patterns to be assessed during Phase 1 prior to the implementation of Phase 2, the delivery of the final scheme.

2.3.4 From the initial design and traffic modelling work that was carried out, it was established that a significant benefit to the operation and capacity of the Wheatsheaf junction was derived from the closure of Cranborne Avenue and has thus always been a key component of the scheme. However, this was based on theoretical traffic modelling and whilst a robust process, there were concerns about whether the post Covid changes in working and travel patterns had affected how the junction was used. The delay in the delivery of the scheme provided an opportunity to close Cranborne Avenue and to review the original traffic modelling assumptions based on actual traffic information that could be collected with Cranborne Avenue closed but without the cost of implementing the full improvement.

2.3.5 Consequently, the first phase, the closure of Cranborne Avenue was carried out under an Experimental Traffic Regulation Order (ETRO) that commenced on 18 March 2022. The ETRO has to be in place for a minimum of 6 months and a maximum period of 18 months and includes a statutory consultation period of 6 months that ended on 19 September 2022. The ETRO can be made permanent any time after 6 months and before the end of the 18-month expiry date of 24 September 2023.

2.3.6 During the consultation period, KCC received 96 responses, 73 objections and 23 in support of the proposals. The majority of responses were received from residents considered to be more directly affected by the closure. A report on the consultation is included in Appendix 2.

2.3.7 Traffic surveys were carried out before and after the closure of Cranborne Avenue. It was noted that traffic throughput at the junction during weekday peak periods was comparable for each of the surveys but with the closure of Cranborne in place, there were significant decreases in average queue lengths at the junction, whilst not having a noticeable detrimental impact elsewhere on the network. This indicated the closure was having a significant benefit to the circa 35,000 trips that are made every day.

through the junction. A report of the traffic assessment of the Wheatsheaf junction before and after the closure of Cranborne Avenue is included in Appendix 3.

- 2.3.8 Safety is also a fundamental consideration in the assessment, both considering the Cranborne junction pre and post closure as well as looking at the Plains Avenue junction, which was likely to see an increase in traffic from displaced vehicles. Based on the 5-year crash records between April 2018 and April 2023, there had been eleven personal injury crashes at the Wheatsheaf junction. Prior to the closure, three were directly associated with Cranborne Avenue, one of which was a fatality, with none since the closure. During the same period there had been no reported personal injury crashes at Plains Avenue. We are aware of a crash that occurred at Plains Avenue, and reported in the Kent Messenger in August 2023 but KCC have been advised by Kent Police that this is a damage only crash and involved no personal injuries. The crash occurred early in the morning before the peak traffic had built up. There is a suggestion from residents that speed was a factor, although this hasn't been confirmed by the police and it should be noted that there is a safety camera immediately south of the junction, so generally speed is regulated at this location. Whilst the traffic surveys have identified a slight increase in vehicles using Plains Avenue, this has not led to additional queues and delays at the junction.
- 2.3.9 Having carefully reviewed the evidence (including all the objections), Neil Baker, KCC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, decided to make the ETRO permanent rather than face the prospect of the road re-opening and causing confusion and uncertainty to drivers. This decision was made following discussions with the local KCC Member.
- 2.3.10 As the Local Highway authority the County Council needs to make some difficult decisions, and whilst it is clearly unfortunate that some local residents feel they are inconvenienced by the closure the decision was made in considering the significant benefits to the large number of users of the strategic road network and the wider Maidstone community, which in itself will also provide benefits to many residents who live in the vicinity of the Wheatsheaf junction.
- 2.3.11 A letter was distributed to local residents on 20 September 2023, informing them of the decision to make the closure permanent, also providing them with a link to the KCC webpage, to view a report on the traffic assessment and benefits derived from the closure of Cranborne Avenue, together with a report on the feedback from the Experimental Traffic Regulation Order consultation. These reports are included in Appendix 2 and 3 and a link to the KCC webpage is also included below.
- <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/road-projects/planned-road-projects/keep-maidstone-moving/wheatsheaf-junction>
- 2.3.12 All objectors to the ETRO were also sent an email on 20 September 2023, informing them of the decision, along with a copy of the resident letter.
- 2.3.13 To conclude this phase of works, measures will be put in place to formalise the closure by replacing the temporary barriers and signing with a permanent layout at the junction.
- 2.3.14 The next phase of the project will now be finalised to achieve the optimum design for the Wheatsheaf junction and consolidate the benefits derived from the closure. The final design and programme for Phase 2 will be confirmed in due course.
- 2.3.15 It is regrettable that it was not possible to debate the permanent closure of Cranborne Avenue at a JTB meeting. A decision had not been made prior to the August JTB but was required to be made prior to the ETRO expiring on 24 September 2023, a fact that was not clear in the update provided for the August JTB. We are aware that

some of the residents feel they did not have an opportunity to express their views against the closure at the August JTB meeting but we can reassure the Board that the Cabinet Member was fully aware of all the objections and their nature when he took the decision to make the closure permanent.

2.3.16 A229 Loose Road junction with Armstrong Road/Park Way

2.3.17 As stated in the previous JTB report, post scheme monitoring had identified the need to provide a separate filter for traffic turning right into Armstrong Road and Park Way. This work has now been completed. The signals will continue to be monitored to ensure timings are optimised.

2.3.18 A229 Loose Road junction with Sheals Crescent

2.3.19 These works are on hold pending a review of the impacts from the changes at the Armstrong Road junction.

2.3.20 A229 Loose Road junction with Cripple Street/Boughton Lane

2.3.21 The original scheme was paused as a result of the opposition received to losing the landscaped area in front of the shops following the earlier consultation carried out on the scheme.

2.3.22 Alternative options, including the provision of half bus layby at the junction have been considered but these do not deliver any noticeable capacity benefits to the junction and the A229 corridor and come with a significant cost. Consequently, KCC will not be proceeding with this scheme.

2.4 A20 Ashford Road junction with Willington Street (LGF Scheme):

2.4.1 Due to other projects being carried out in the vicinity of this junction, construction will need to be programmed to commence after the A249 Bearsted Road project has been completed.

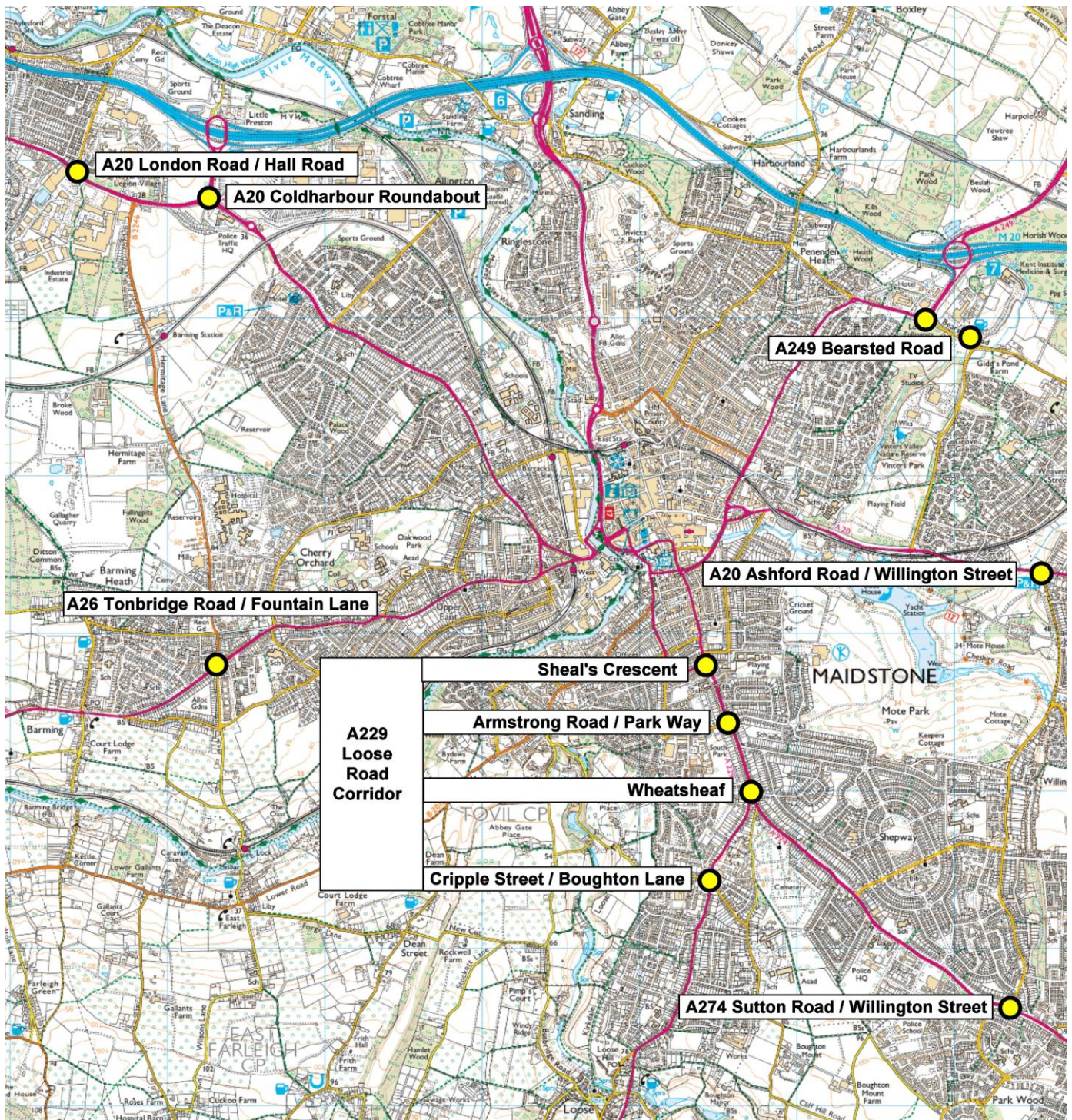
2.5 A26 Tonbridge Road junction with Fountain Lane (Developer Funded Scheme):

2.5.1 The status of this scheme has not changed since previous updates. The work being undertaken to review the current proposal against the existing and predicted traffic flows is nearing completion and will be reported at a future JTB meeting.

2.6 A274 Sutton Road junction with Willington Street (Developer Funded Scheme):

2.6.1 This is a developer funded scheme with no deadline on the spend, and as such, this scheme will be promoted towards the end of the overall programme to allow schemes with funding constraints to be delivered first. This will ensure that other funding streams which have been secured are not lost and reallocated outside of the County.

3. Appendix 1: Map of Highway Improvement Schemes in Maidstone



Appendix 2 - Consultation Report on Experimental Traffic Regulation Order for Closure of Cranborne Avenue.

Appendix 3 - Wheatsheaf Junction – Improvement Options Report